

Birches Green Junior School

Birches Green Road, Erdington, Birmingham, West Midlands B24 9SR

Inspection dates

16–17 July 2019

Overall effectiveness	Inadequate
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Inadequate
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Inadequate
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- Leaders have been too slow to react to the decline in pupils' progress. Leaders, including governors, have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to improve.
- Frequent changes and weaknesses in staffing have hindered school improvement over the past two years. Instability in staffing and leadership continue to hinder improvement.
- Governors do not have effective oversight of the school's performance. This prevents them from holding leaders to account effectively. Governors' action plans for improvement are not sharp enough.
- School improvement plans lack precision, detail and rigour. As a result, leaders have not tackled areas for improvement rapidly enough.
- The quality of teaching over time has been weak. However, recently appointed assistant headteachers have supported improvements but teaching is not consistently good.
- Subject leaders do not make checks on the quality of teaching and learning in the subjects they are responsible for.
- Teachers do not provide enough opportunities for pupils to reason and problem-solve in mathematics. They do not ensure that pupils understand the meaning of words they read nor do they insist on correct punctuation in writing.
- The curriculum is weak. It does not provide enough opportunities for pupils to develop subject-specific skills, knowledge and understanding. As a result, pupils are not working at the expected levels for their age in science and wider curriculum subjects.
- Pupils' absence has been above the national average for the past two years. Persistent absence has reduced this year but remains well above the national figure. This has been the case for at least the past four years.
- Leaders are not effectively monitoring additional pupil premium funding to ensure that all disadvantaged pupils make the progress they are capable of.
- Leaders do not make effective use of the additional funding for physical education (PE) and sport.

The school has the following strengths

- The headteacher has developed a caring and inclusive environment in which individual pupils' welfare needs are known and met.
- Pupils are polite and respectful, and value the opportunities they have at school.
- There are clear and effective procedures to ensure that pupils are safe.
- Pupils' attainment at the end of key stage 2 in the grammar, punctuation and spelling test was above the national average in 2018.

Full report

In accordance with section 44(1) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Urgently improve leadership and management, by ensuring that:
 - leaders accurately identify what the school does well and what it needs to improve upon, and use this information to set clear, measurable targets in the school's improvement planning
 - the use of pupil premium funding is monitored rigorously so that disadvantaged pupils make accelerated progress
 - the skills of subject leaders are developed, so that they can have a greater impact on improving teaching, learning and assessment across the curriculum
 - the curriculum properly equips pupils with the knowledge, skills and understanding that they need across a range of subjects.
- Rectify the weaknesses in governance by ensuring that governors:
 - establish a structure that allows the governing body to fulfil all its statutory duties and provide effective strategic oversight of the school's performance
 - develop their skills so that they are well informed about the school's performance and provide effective and robust challenge for school leaders.
- Improve the quality and consistency of teaching and learning and thus improve pupils' progress and raise their attainment by:
 - developing pupils' reasoning and problem-solving skills in mathematics
 - ensuring that pupils understand the meaning of vocabulary they are reading
 - eliminating errors in basic punctuation in writing.
- Further refine and fully embed the arrangements for monitoring attendance so that absence and persistent absence continue to fall.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium funding should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Inadequate

- Leaders, including governors, have been too slow to respond to the decline in the school's performance since the previous inspection. Leaders have not demonstrated the capacity to act swiftly to address the weaknesses within the school. As a result, the school is failing to provide an acceptable standard of education for pupils.
- Leadership is fragile at all levels. Recently appointed leaders understand that they must bring about rapid and significant improvement. These leaders have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of their subjects and have implemented new initiatives to improve teaching. These initiatives are beginning to improve current pupils' attainment and progress. However, the impact is not yet enough to make up for previous underperformance.
- In the past, there has been insufficient focus by school leaders on checking the impact of teaching on pupils' learning and progress. Since September 2018, the two new-to-role assistant headteachers have started to implement procedures to monitor the quality of teaching in the school. This is beginning to develop consistency in teaching and learning in English and mathematics.
- Improvement planning is weak. The leaders' plans for improvement do not clearly state what intended improvement will look like. Leaders do not include precise measures to evaluate the impact of actions, nor do they identify who will carry out the monitoring. Therefore, this weak planning is a barrier to improving the quality of education pupils experience.
- Leaders' use of the pupil premium funding has not been effective. Leaders do not have an accurate understanding of the impact of the funding and do not use the money received effectively to meet the needs of disadvantaged pupils across the school. Consequently, in the past these pupils have not made the progress they should have.
- Subject leaders, some of whom are very new to their leadership role, are keen and have an overview of their subject. They have generated action plans on how to develop consistency of teaching and learning in their subjects. However, they have not had the opportunities to implement these changes or monitor their impact. Neither are there effective systems in place to assess pupil attainment and progress in subjects.
- The school has experienced instability in governance and staffing over the past two years. Leaders' actions to manage this have not been strong or rapid enough to overcome these difficulties. Consequently, school improvement planning and pupils' learning have been disrupted.
- The school's curriculum is poorly planned and unbalanced. Pupils' books show shallow and irregular coverage of some subjects, such as science, history and geography. This limits pupils' depth of skills, knowledge and understanding within these subjects. Pupils say that they enjoy the opportunities that they have to go on school trips that link to the curriculum. These have included visits to a local museum as part of their history learning and collaborative learning with pupils from a nearby school about the Stone Age.

- Leaders have engaged with external support since the previous inspection. For example, external advisers from the local authority and a local collaboration have worked with the two assistant headteachers to develop their leadership skills in evaluating and developing the quality of teaching, particularly in English and mathematics. Current pupils' books show some improvement in attainment and progress in these subjects. Nonetheless, improvements have been implemented with a lack of urgency and rigour.
- The leader who has temporary responsibility for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) ensures that pupils are supported and that their achievement is tracked. Leaders support the transition for pupils with SEND into key stage 2 through meetings with parents and additional sessions for the pupils in the school. This helps pupils to settle into school well and ensures that their needs are met. Parent feedback from 'Inspire workshops' during transition included positive comments such as, 'Opportunities to work alongside own child, experiencing a range of activities, seeing how children learn and meeting new staff'.
- Leaders use the PE and sport funding to provide sporting activities and opportunities for pupils, for example cricket, tennis, basketball and gymnastics. However, leaders do not have systems in place to monitor and evaluate the impact of the PE provision so they do not know how effectively the funding is being spent or what difference it is making to pupils' physical health and well-being. For example, leaders were unable to say how many pupils meet the swimming requirements of the national curriculum.
- Leaders' actions have not improved the attendance rates for pupils who are persistently absent. Despite the actions of leaders and the family support worker, the pattern of low attendance has not improved sufficiently.
- Leaders ensure that pupils are offered opportunities to make a positive contribution to their community. School councillors are elected by other pupils. This helps pupils to understand democratic processes. Pupils enjoy taking on roles of responsibility. Pupils told inspectors, 'It is not just about being responsible and being a leader. It is about helping and caring for others.'
- The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers.

Governance of the school

- Governors want all pupils in the school to have a range of high-quality life experiences. They want pupils to feel cared for and nurtured. However, governors have not identified and responded to the decline in school performance.
- The governing body has an understanding of the school's systems for ensuring that pupils are safe. They monitor safeguarding processes regularly and check that training and policies are up to date.
- Governors recognise that the school is underperforming. They identify that staffing instability and a lack of leadership capacity have contributed to the decline in standards since the previous inspection. In spite of this, they have not taken effective action to address these issues and ensure that the quality of education improves.
- The governing body does not have a precise enough understanding of assessment information. Governors do not have an informed view of the quality of teaching in the

school and how this affects pupils' progress. As a result, they are not able to provide effective challenge to, and support for, leaders.

- Governors do not have a strategic approach to monitoring the school's priorities. The information they gather on visits to the school is not always shared with the full governing body. This limits their ability to hold leaders to account. Identified actions or questions are not followed up.
- Governors do not check carefully enough on the impact of additional funding for pupil premium or sport. Consequently, they are unaware that the money is not having the intended effect or that statutory responsibilities for publishing the required information on the school's website are not met.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Records show that safeguarding concerns are raised and managed in line with the school's policy. Systems are in place to ensure that the response identifies the most appropriate course of action to be taken. Support is targeted appropriately and closely monitored.
- Staff receive effective training in safeguarding matters. As a result, they know the signs of different types of abuse and are clear about how to report any concerns they have using the school's agreed procedures.
- Pupils are taught how to stay safe in a range of contexts. They benefit from lessons on internet safety, road safety and fire safety. Pupils who spoke to inspectors were clear on how community police worked with them to help keep them safe during community events such as bonfire night and Halloween.
- Leaders have ensured that appropriate measures are in place to check that staff are suitable to work with children. Records in respect of this are well maintained.
- The safeguarding team work well together. The family support worker brings comprehensive community and contextual safeguarding knowledge to the team. This strengthens the ability to target the right support at the right time, both to a pupil and to their family. Leaders demonstrate the impact and positive difference they are making to pupils being safe and, in turn, ready to learn.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching and learning varies across classes and between subjects. Teaching in English and mathematics is overall more effective than in other subjects because this has been a key priority for the school and the focus of staff training. Nevertheless, even in English and mathematics, not all teaching is consistently good.
- The quality of teaching in the past has been inconsistent. This has resulted in pupils not reaching the standards of which they are capable or fulfilling their true potential.
- Recently, due to the support and challenge given by the assistant headteachers, the quality of teaching overall is improving, and is now mostly having a positive impact on learning, including in reading, writing and mathematics. This is reflected in the

improving progress that all groups of current pupils now make in each year group, with a much larger proportion on track to reach standards typical of their age.

- Teachers recognise that many pupils have gaps in their learning due to inconsistent teaching previously. Some teachers are able to identify these gaps and plan teaching appropriately. For example, in Year 4, close attention is paid to developing pupils' sentence structure through the '5 tick process' and developing a unit of work through a carefully planned, progressive programme of work. Still, this is not the case in all classes. The gaps in knowledge and understanding, and in particular some pupils' weak skills in basic punctuation, hinder the progress they make in learning across the curriculum.
- Pupils acquire good skills of calculation in most classes. However, teaching does not consistently challenge pupils to apply their skills to problem-solving and reasoning. As a result, the teaching of mathematics does not promote pupils' good progress in some aspects of the mathematics curriculum. This is limiting the opportunities for the most able pupils to reach the higher standard.
- Some teachers use texts well to develop pupils' reading. They choose texts that interest pupils and help them learn to infer meaning. Pupils develop comprehension and reading skills through these sessions and some year groups use what they have learned from reading to inform their writing. However, this is inconsistent.
- Pupils with lower prior attainment do not use phonics well enough to help read words they do not know. This slows their fluency and understanding. Pupils who spoke to inspectors say they enjoy reading and that their teachers read to them on occasions. Pupils who read to inspectors were not always clear on the meanings of individual words. As a result, they were guessing the sense of some words and this prevents deeper understanding and discussion of the text.
- Additional adults provide support for pupils, both within class and through intervention groups. Support staff receive training to lead specific interventions. The impact of this support on pupil progress is variable.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- From the moment the inspectors walked into the school building, pupils presented themselves as confident individuals who initiated or responded to conversation well.
- A strength of Birches Green Junior School is the individual way in which staff know and nurture each pupil in their care. Several staff who spoke to inspectors expressed that the school had a 'family feel'. Pupils also shared this during a meeting with an inspector when they spoke of the importance of friendships and that there is always an adult they can talk to if they are worried in any way.
- Lunchtimes are calm and well-organised. Pupils and staff chat socially but respectfully with each other. Playtimes provide a range of physical opportunities including playing of games, sitting in a quiet area with friends or reading. Specially trained staff support pupils who might find the social times of lunchtime tricky to cope with. The staff initiate

or participate in activities and this allows them to help pupils manage their behaviour and feelings successfully and return to the classroom ready to learn.

- Leaders ensure that pupils know how to stay safe online. Pupils talk knowledgeably about the information that should not be shared when using the internet. They know they must not reveal personal information to strangers. A pupil explained that they also learn to stay physically safe and recounted when they had worked alongside community police officers to monitor the speed of vehicles in the vicinity of the school. Another pupil chipped into the discussion: 'Oh yes, stop, drop and roll. The fire service told us what to do if there was a fire and you need to evacuate a building.'
- Pupils' leadership skills are developed well through their positions of responsibility on the school council and as house captains. A child eloquently explained the responsibility and accountability of delivering the correct number of newspapers to certain classrooms each week. 'It has to be right. You can't have the wrong class getting the wrong newspaper.'
- A few pupils could explain how to be a successful learner and described how 'steps to success', 'LO tick or LO arrow' and 'now' support them to be successful learners. As yet, this is not known by all pupils.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- The overall judgement of requires improvement is because of the high level of pupils being persistently absent. Although it has reduced this year, it has been well above the national average for at least the past four years. Absence also is above national figures.
- Pupils' behaviour and conduct around school are good.
- Pupils mostly work well and respectfully within lessons. Work in pupils' books shows that they understand the expectations set for them regarding presentation and most pupils work hard to reach or exceed these expectations.
- Leaders work hard to promote and reward the value of good attendance. Pupils can explain how assemblies support the positive message on attendance and many were striving for 100% attendance. A member of the school council spoke of their involvement in presenting a case for the choice of venue for the reward outing for good attendance to the headteacher.
- Leaders monitor attendance at a basic level and have systems in place to ensure that absence is followed up promptly. They are alert to the possibility of children going missing from education and work with external agencies to minimise any risk. However, leadership of attendance is not yet strategic and does not analyse attendance at a level that ensures that no groups of pupils are disadvantaged by low attendance.
- During the inspection, two important events, the Year 6 leavers' assembly and a merit awards assembly, took place. Pupils showed maturity and control as they were generally able to sustain concentration on learning prior to attending these events, which also involved performing to parents.

- Pupils who spoke to inspectors show they understand the behaviour policy and are clear that there is very little bullying at Birches Green. They told inspectors that staff are, 'really good at helping sort things'. Pupils also said that staff expect them to develop some of their own strategies to manage situations but they help them to do this. Pupils feel safe and this view was echoed by parents who spoke to an inspector at the start of the school day.
- Exclusions are managed appropriately and are enabling pupils to have support that allows them to successfully remain in school.

Outcomes for pupils

Inadequate

- Historically, attainment at the end of key stage 2 in reading, writing and mathematics has been below national averages. Improved implementation of whole-school agreed approaches has started to raise teachers' expectations and improve standards in reading, writing and mathematics. Visits to lessons, scrutiny of pupils' work and the school's own assessment information provide evidence that all pupils, including those who speak English as an additional language, are making up lost ground but this is not yet enough to overcome previous underachievement.
- Pupils do not experience enough opportunities to problem-solve and reason in mathematics. This means they are not able to show what they know and understand in different mathematical contexts or across different subjects. Thus, progress is not as good as it could be.
- Leaders have established a reading routine that includes taught and independent sessions. Pupils revisit a text over several sessions. Despite this, they do not always understand the meanings of words within the text. This limits how well pupils can answer detailed questions and the progress they make.
- There are signs that current disadvantaged pupils are beginning to make progress with more working at age-related expectations. However, this is slow. Disadvantaged pupils' progress reflects that of other pupils in the school. The standards that this group reach by the end of key stage 2 are well below those of other pupils nationally.
- Historically, the most able pupils underachieve. Too few reach the higher standards in the end of key stage 2 national assessments. This is because expectations of what these pupils can achieve have not previously been high enough. Current work in pupils' books shows that teachers are providing work that is better matched to pupils' abilities. Consequently, increasing challenge is being put in place and higher-attaining pupils are making better progress.
- In 2017 and 2018, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard for the grammar, punctuation and spelling test at the end of key stage 2 was at least in line with the national average for the expected standard and above at the higher standard. However, pupils do not consistently use and apply these skills well in their writing. Teachers accept incorrectly punctuated work and do not always address pupils' errors. This reduces their progress in writing in English and wider curriculum subjects.

- Attainment in science at the end of key stage 2 has improved over the previous three years. Yet, it still remains well below national figures.
- The quality of pupils' learning varies between classes and subjects. Where teaching is more effective, current pupils are making better progress. As a result, more pupils are working at age-related expectations in English and mathematics. This is yet to be seen in all subjects.

School details

Unique reference number	103168
Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	10111662

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Junior
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	7 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	230
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Beverley Roberts
Headteacher	Mary McManus
Telephone number	01213 733 457
Website	www.birchgnj.bham.sch.uk/
Email address	enquiry@birchgnj.bham.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	3–5 May 2017

Information about this school

- Birches Green Junior School is smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- The senior leadership team was restructured in September 2018 to include the headteacher and two serving teachers who were appointed as assistant headteachers.
- Pupils come from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds. A high proportion of pupils speak English as an additional language.
- More than half of the pupils are known to be eligible for the pupil premium.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is broadly in line with the national average. The proportion of pupils who have an education, health and care plan is below the national average.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed pupils in lessons. Many of these observations were done jointly with school leaders.
- Inspectors looked at a wide range of pupils' work in classrooms. They reviewed samples of pupils' work in English, mathematics and wider curriculum books with leaders. In addition, inspectors reviewed pupils' work in their science books. A group of pupils read to an inspector and discussed their reading.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher and members of staff with leadership responsibilities. Discussions were held with members of the governing body, external consultants for school improvement and a representative of the local authority. Inspectors reviewed and discussed the current assessment information held by the school.
- Inspectors took account of the seven free-text responses to Parent View as well comments made by parents as they brought their children to school. There were insufficient responses to Ofsted's online Parent View survey for an analysis to be carried out.
- There were no responses to Ofsted's staff or pupil online questionnaire. Staff views were considered during a meeting held with some staff and an inspector.
- During lessons and in break and lunchtimes, inspectors discussed with pupils their views about the school. Inspectors also observed pupils' well-being and safety when they were in the playground. They spoke to a group of pupils separately about their well-being and their learning.
- An inspector sat in on an assembly led by an assistant headteacher.
- A number of documents were reviewed, including: the school's own self-evaluation; the school development plan; the school's data on pupils' attainment and progress; minutes of governors' meetings; and records relating to behaviour, attendance, risk assessments and safeguarding. The school's website was also studied.

Inspection team

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